

## Eliciting Youth and Parental Strengths and Needs

*Bright Futures: Guidelines for Health Supervision of Infants, Children, and Adolescents*, 4th Edition, is based on the belief that effective health supervision involves an ongoing partnership between health care professionals and families. The success of Bright Futures health supervision depends on creating and nurturing a true partnership through which children and adolescents, families, and health care professionals work together to establish both short- and long-term goals. Working in partnership with the family, health care professionals can be remarkably effective in promoting health. By eliciting youth and parental strengths and needs, the health care professional is creating opportunities for thoughtful dialogue among adolescents, families, and health care professionals.

Bright Futures views health as contextual (ie, the child is viewed within the context of the family and community). Most families want to learn how to help their children reach full potential.

Eliciting youth and parental strengths and needs promotes this learning and affirms and strengthens the role of families as primary partners in health promotion. Because families most often are responsible for implementing next steps and recommendations, it is important that health care professionals listen to and learn from their perspectives.

Systematically eliciting youth, parent, and family strengths and needs can:

- Improve communication among adolescents, parents, and health care professionals by increasing the likelihood that concerns will be addressed during the visit. When adolescents and parents note that their concerns are considered important by the health care professional, their satisfaction with the quality of care improves.
- Help build rapport with adolescents and parents by demonstrating respect and creating a partnership between the health care professional and family members that focuses on identifying and meeting the

entire family's needs. A strong relationship between the health care professional and the family can serve as an important foundation from which to address specific problems should they arise later.

- Build youth and parental confidence by eliciting concerns and honoring their importance.
- Allow health care professionals to prioritize needs and issues for discussion and follow up and facilitate early detection of potential problems.
- Identify needed referrals or community resources that will enhance a family's ability to maximize the child's development.
- Offer opportunities for parents to share triumphs and challenges of child rearing. Health care professionals can

### ABOUT BRIGHT FUTURES

Bright Futures is a national health promotion and prevention initiative, led by the American Academy of Pediatrics and supported by the Maternal and Child Health Bureau, Health Resources and Services Administration. The *Bright Futures Guidelines* provide theory-based and evidence-driven guidance for all preventive care screenings and well-child visits. Bright Futures content can be incorporated into many public health programs such as home visiting, child care, school-based health clinics, and many others. Materials developed especially for families are also available. Learn more about Bright Futures and get Bright Futures materials by visiting [brightfutures.aap.org](http://brightfutures.aap.org).



use this information to help parents devise strategies to address issues in the future.

- Support patient- and family-centered approaches to care.

## IMPLEMENTING A SYSTEM FOR ELICITING YOUTH AND PARENTAL STRENGTHS AND NEEDS

### 1. Form an improvement team.

Select a team to work together to plan for and test improvements in the way youth and parental strengths and needs are elicited in the office. Team members should be enthusiastic and willing to test new ideas.

- Discuss the challenges the team anticipates facing in implementing approaches to eliciting youth and parental strengths and needs.
- Consider involving adolescents and parents in the team—their insights are likely to be especially helpful.

### 2. Define youth and parental strengths and needs for the office.

It may be easier to focus on a particular group of patients when adopting new strategies for eliciting youth and parental concerns. It often is easier to start with a small, focused population, such as newborns or preschool-aged children, when testing new approaches. After the system is in place, the office can expand its focus to address other ages.

- Discuss with office staff the challenge of balancing recommended anticipatory guidance and preventive services with addressing family strengths and needs.
- Review several strategies and tools that exist to elicit youth and parental concerns during office visits effectively, as well as different approaches that may lend themselves to different ages. For example, when children are younger, much of the visit focuses on obtaining information from parents, so strategies for adults, such as motivational interviewing, can be effective (eg, see [Search Institute](#) to access a framework of 40 Developmental Assets® by age for early childhood, ages 3-5; grades K-3, ages 5-9; middle childhood, ages 8-12; and adolescents, ages 12-18).
- Gather information on a range of tools and strategies. For example, the Parents' Evaluation of Developmental Status is designed to help identify developmental issues as well as to elicit parental needs effectively. Other tools to consider include HEEADSSS (for adolescents), Motivational Interviewing, GIMB (Generosity, Independence, Mastery, Belonging), and The Helping Skill.

- Determine topics that the practice will address during the visit and topics that will be referred to outside sources. For topics that can be addressed effectively through a clinic-based encounter (eg, toilet training), provide counseling, use patient education materials, recommend appropriate resources (eg, book, video), and schedule a follow-up appointment as needed. Topics such as intimate partner violence or substance use may require outside referrals and/or a series of follow-up appointments.
- Consider what new resources or referrals the practice may need. Identify new community resources or referrals for issues that are best handled outside the office. Gathering data about the most common concerns of patients may help in deciding which referrals and community resources are most likely to be needed and used by patients. (See Community Resources.)

### 3. Test new ideas.

The improvement team can conduct small tests to check the new system, determine how to integrate tools into practice flow, and identify further refinements needed before expanding to the entire office. Include health care professionals and staff in this process.

- Map the office flow. Develop a flowchart that includes steps for administering tools and integrating them into the office routine. The office flowchart often will help clarify roles and responsibilities of team members.
- Use prompts and reminders. Build reminders and prompts into new routines whenever and wherever possible. It is particularly easy to forget new steps when the day is busy. Be sure to get input from staff performing new routines about what types of prompts might be helpful (eg, sticky notes, signs, stickers, materials).
- Be thorough when testing new strategies. Do not forget to check seemingly minor details, such as where in the chart a screening tool should be placed or how to document information gathered from the patient. This may require some planning and experimentation.

For new strategies and tools that will be spread throughout the office:

- Check in regularly on how changes are affecting staff.
  - Communicate with staff about the new system. Seeking ideas and feedback from staff will help in developing the right ways to systematically elicit youth and parental concerns.

- Inform staff members that tools and resources are now available so they can use them with patients and families.
- Share information about how using these tools and approaches will improve patient care.
- Describe how materials will be organized so that staff can easily access materials and information as needed.
- Train health care professionals and staff.
  - Consider holding informal training sessions for all staff to present the rationale for using new tools. Include scientific evidence that supports their use. Provide opportunities for questions and review the new tools and how they will be used.
  - Discuss new roles or responsibilities for staff or health care professionals.
  - Consider holding a focused session on how to talk about sensitive topics or how to handle difficult situations that may arise as a result of using the new tools (eg, maternal depression, violence).
  - Be sure to raise awareness among care team staff about how cultural issues such as beliefs and values can affect a patient's openness. It may be helpful to discuss staff experiences with those issues and develop strategies for addressing them.
- 4. Solicit youth, parent, and staff feedback about the system.**
  - Ask adolescents and parents their opinion of new tools or strategies.
    - Do adolescents and parents find the new tools or strategies helpful?
    - Are some tools or strategies especially helpful to adolescents and parents?
    - Do they have questions about why the practice is doing things differently?
    - Keep track of whether language, literacy, and cultural norms are creating barriers for patients and families in sharing strengths and needs.
  - Ask staff their opinion of the new strategies, including the tools.
    - What do staff report about their experiences using the new strategy?
    - Do they feel the tools are uncovering important issues and information?
    - Does using the new tools interrupt the office flow?
    - What are the benefits and costs to using this new tool or strategy?
    - Has staff received comments from patients or families about the new tools and strategies?
  - Gather system data to assess the strategy.
    - Review charts to track documentation of assessment of strengths and needs.
    - Formally survey adolescents and parents to gather feedback at the practice level.
    - Determine whether the new strategy lengthens visit time.
    - Summarize findings and disseminate them throughout your practice.

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